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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001470

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DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS; NSC FOR E.MILLARD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/03/2014

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SUBJECT: MALDIVES: GAYOOM TRIES FOR BUSINESS AS USUAL  
WHILE THE BUSINESS OF ARRESTING MPS CONTINUES

REF: COLOMBO 1427 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Charge' d'Affaires James F. Entwistle. Reason 1.4(b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Maldivian President Gayoom shuffled members of his Cabinet September 1 as he divested himself of two long-held ministerial portfolios: defense and finance. As planned, the police also separated from the National Security Service on September 1, becoming a "civilian force." Seventy-eight people, including four arrested August 25-26, remain detained without charge in the wake of the August 12-13 protests on Male'. The government plans during the week of September 5 to examine continuing necessity for the State of Emergency. While Gayoom and the government appear to be conducting business as usual, the continuing detentions and arrests, especially of respected Maldivians, clearly show that all is not copasetic on the islands. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) CABINET CHANGES: On September 1, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom announced changes in his Cabinet and other leadership positions in the government. Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, Presidential Communications Director, described the reassignments to poloff on September 1 as changes long planned by President Gayoom. Gayoom had wanted to make changes even last November during his inauguration, Shaheed stated, but felt that addressing reform issues was a high priority. With the reforms underway, Shaheed claimed, the "stage was set for other changes," and Shaheed indicated that more changes would be forthcoming.

3. (SBU) Following is a list of the senior-level personnel changes that President Gayoom made on September 1:

-- Hameed Zakariyya, long-time MFA Director General for International Affairs, has been appointed as Foreign Secretary. Zakariyya fills the vacancy left by Shaheed

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himself when he went from Permanent Secretary to Presidential Communications Director earlier this year.

-- Anbaree Abdul Sattar was appointed as Ambassador. He had been the Minister of State for Defense and National Security -- the working head of the ministry, under Gayoom, who had held the ministerial portfolio. Shaheed predicted that Sattar will likely become the new High Commissioner to India. The government publicly announced its intent September 2 to open a High Commissioner in India, but did not name Sattar or specify a time frame for the establishment of the Mission.

-- Ismail Shafeeu became Minister of Defense and National Security, a portfolio formerly held by the President. Shafeeu was formerly Minister of Home Affairs and Environment. (Note: As Environment Minister, Shafeeu was knowledgeable and concerned about the impact of global warming and other issues on Maldives.)

-- Mohamed Jaleel became Minister of Finance and Treasury. He was formerly Minister of State for Finance under President Gayoom, who had held the ministerial portfolio himself. (Note: As Finance Minister, Jaleel seemed savvy and comfortable with international organizations. He was focused on what course of action was best for Maldives' development.)

-- Umar Zahir became the Minister of Home Affairs, which now includes the newly separate civilian police force. He had formerly been Minister of Construction.

-- The ministries of Construction and Environment have been combined. Although deputy ministers have been assigned to each portfolio, no overall minister has been named, as of yet.

4. (C) POLICE AND SECURITY SERVICE SEPARATE: In an anticipated move announced last February by the President, the police force separated from the National Security Service (NSS) on September 1. Prior, both forces had been within the Defense Ministry. With the separation, the police have become a "civilian force" under the Home Affairs Ministry, as described by Shaheed. Brigadier Adam Zahir, the former NSS Chief of Police retains the same role, now as Commissioner of Police. During an August 25-27 trip to Maldives, DATT met with several senior officers in the NSS who expressed their concern about the separation and the resulting uncertainty

over roles and missions between the two forces (see DAO Septel).

15. (C) UPDATE ON PROTEST-RELATED EVENTS: On September 1, Dr. Shaheed also provided poloff with an update on the detainees being held since the August 12-13 protests on Male'. Shaheed said that 78 people were currently in detention, including additional 4 members of the Special Majlis who had been arrested the previous (August 25-26) weekend. To date, 122 detainees had been released, Shaheed stated. He also confirmed that no charges have been filed against any of those being held, as the police are still continuing their investigations. Regarding the four recently arrested Special Majlis MPs, Shaheed stated that they were known associates of Special Majlis MP Gasim Ibrahim -- the likely pro-reform candidate for Speaker -- and that it was expected that that more people would be "required for questioning."

16. (C) Regarding the State of Emergency, Shaheed said that the government would likely review the declaration, in effect since August 13, early next week to evaluate the feasibility of revoking it. Shaheed described its longevity in "days and weeks instead of months." (Note: The State of Emergency is automatically in place for three months once issued and can be lifted only if the President rescinds it, according to the Constitution. If the State of Emergency is lifted, it will likely mean a restoration of fundamental rights, including access to a lawyer while in detention. End Note.)

17. (C) Gayoom continues to send envoys to major bilateral partners around the world to brief the foreign governments on the August 12-13 events and current situation. In addition to Ambassador Latheef, sent as envoy to the U.S., other government officials have gone to the UK, Germany, Italy, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, and Japan. Poloff at the British High Commission noted that the three EU countries provide the highest percentage of tourism to Maldives, adding that Gayoom had sent his tourism minister as envoy to the EU. In a follow up to the EU delegation that visited Maldives on August 23, Heads of Mission from the Sri Lanka-based British High Commission and Dutch Embassy, as well as the EU representative from the mission in India, plan a follow-up delegation to Maldives on September 6. (An Embassy team led by DCM will be in Male' September 19-20 to open the annual U.S. trade fair; the Ambassador plans to meet with Gayoom later in September.)

18. (C) COMMENT: Gayoom is clearly worried about the international focus on Maldives in the wake of the August 12-13 protests, as evidenced by the parade of envoys visiting foreign capitals. Throughout the events, Gayoom and his government have publicly dismissed the notion that demonstration participants were truly pro-reform activists, instead choosing to characterize those implicated as a disruption to the reform process. Gayoom's recent Cabinet shuffle appears to be an attempt to convince Maldivians and the international community that business is continuing as usual and his reform process is on track. Given that approximately 10 members of the Special Majlis -- the body convened solely to address constitutional reforms -- are in prison, it is difficult to accept that all is copasetic on the islands. Although Gayoom clearly recognizes the need for reform, after 26 years as President, he likely has specific ideas about the tenor and shape of those changes. As events over the past twelve months demonstrate, his conception of reform seems to differ at times from other Maldivians', and he may be finding the process harder and harder to control. Nonetheless, it is in our interest that Gayoom's reform efforts succeed and that he be encouraged to continue down the right path. END SUMMARY.

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